Instructors:

- **Dr. Gregory R. Perry**, Associate Professor of New Testament, Covenant Seminary
- **Dr. Nelson Jennings**, Executive Director, Overseas Ministries Study Center

Course Description

Recently, Timothy Tennant has underscored the urgency of equipping pastors who are “culturally savvy, theologically nuanced disciple-makers” instead of congregational managers for a Christendom that no longer exists. While “making disciples of all the nations” has always been a cross-cultural and inter-cultural mission, many North American congregations are feeling important demographic shifts that are giving them multiple opportunities to love neighbors from around the world, who now live next door.

Globalization, urbanization, and “reverse migration” are not the only patterns affecting majority culture congregations in North America. In the wake of paradigm shifts in global missions, the missionary God is both bringing missionaries to and sending missionaries from the post-Christian West to partner with other parts of the global church for “the renewal of all things.” Indeed, since the 1980s, Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, the Gospel and Our Culture Network, and others have called western churches to “an ongoing conversion” and to “a missionary encounter with western culture.”

This course’s central concern is cultivating congregational practices of Christian disciple-making that are robust enough to form a “renewing, maturing humanity” which produces vital signs and foretastes of God’s Reign for the renewal of human flourishing within the increasingly complex cultural settings of North American cities and towns.

Course Objectives

Participants will:

1) Deepen their understanding of how the gospel enters cultures through translation to form alternative societies (churches) that embody an organic exchange between the vine of the gospel and the cultural soils of particular places.

2) Engage and evaluate theologies of culture and “contextualization” in order to articulate the church’s identity and mission according to standards of biblical faithfulness, and cultural fittingness.
3) Remember and re-articulate practices of Christian worship and witness that form the church’s identity and missional vocation.

4) Identify, describe, and evaluate missional improvisations—contextualized gestures of Christian discipleship—using case studies (from your ministries and others) with a view toward their cultivation of renewed image-bearing to produce human flourishing in particular places among particular peoples.

5) Study and discuss important paradigm shifts in the history of Christian missions, giving focused attention to post-colonial developments in late modernity.

6) Articulate a theology of congregational Christian missions that critically engages the Reformed tradition in relation to other traditions in the global church as a fruit of an ongoing gospel encounter in one’s own context and of growing relations, even partnerships, with cultural insiders in other contexts.

7) Acquire and/or strengthen their use of demographic and ethnographic tools to learn from the places their congregations serve.

8) Reevaluate their personal and congregational practices of local and international Christian missions in a collaborative process with the Holy Spirit, church officers, lay leaders, and local and international partners in order to re-articulate their missions practices within budgetary, leadership, and other resource and relational limits.

Required Reading


GOSPEL


CULTURE


CHURCH


Other Required Readings and Viewings posted on Sakai course page.


Assessments

1) **Readings, participation, online discussion posts** – Much of your reading and note taking will be done prior to your arrival on campus in January. You will participate in 8 discussion forum posts (1 in response to each required book). You will also respond to 4 posts from your peers (1 in response to a peer’s post on Goheen, 1 in response to a peer’s post on Wright, 1 in response to a peer’s post on a book in the Culture section; and 1 in response to a peer’s post on a book in the Church section). Your first 8 posts will be between 200–300 words each. Your 4 response posts will be between 100–150 words each. **20% of total grade.**

2) **Contextualization Case Studies** – Each participant will write up a case study description of a contextualization challenge where your congregation is “in process” to translate and “learn the ways of Christ” in particular areas of image-bearing in your context (i.e., vocational discipleship; gender, marriage and singleness; racial reconciliation; creation care, etc.). Please include details about the people (with permission or by renaming), ministry structures, partnerships, and other resources you are cultivating to engage this issue or set of issues. Each of you will distribute your case to the other participants in the class (using the e-mail function on Sakai) no later than December 5, 2015. This should provide adequate time for you and your peers to read and digest the cases in time for your arrival on campus. Each of you will present your case in the seminar, and the group will apply the *Mission Improv* framework to engage and evaluate it together. **20% of total grade.**

3) **Discipleship Curriculum-Mapping** – Each student will identify, describe and evaluate learning resources for equipping disciple-makers in their local congregations. He or she will map their congregation’s disciple-making curriculum from the moment new members enter the congregation until their recognition, support, and ongoing growth as disciple-makers in various roles of service. Each student will bring his or her map and present it in class describing who, what, when, where, how, and with whom members are equipped as disciples for disciple-making. On February 13, 2016, three weeks after our meetings in St Louis, each student will turn in an annotated discipleship
curriculum map that reevaluates it in relation to the Mission Improv framework and other discipleship resources. 20% of total grade.

4) Congregational Practices of Worship and Witness – On March 5, 2016, six weeks after our meetings in St Louis, each student will submit a 3,000–3,600 word (10–12 page) description of a reevaluation of your congregational practices of worship and witness. The reevaluation process must include appropriate staff, officers, lay leadership, neighbors, and near and distant ministry partners. The project will include formulating, conducting, and analyzing an interview/survey that articulates congregational practices of worship and witness and evaluates them within a lived ecclesiology of Christian missions that understands discipleship as restoring image-bearers to their covenantal identity and vocations. The project’s documentation will reveal a substantial, constructive engagement with the learning resources of the course. 40% of total grade.